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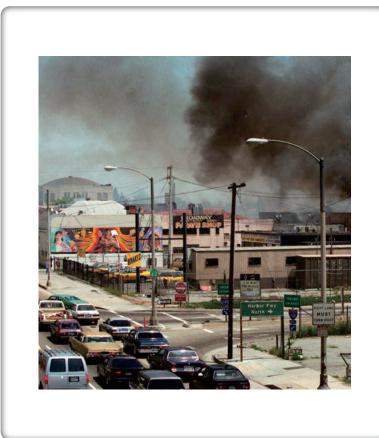
(YOK center for Korean American Studies, UC Riverside)



#### UCRIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA The Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies

# Korean American Identity & the 1992 Los Angeles Riots





PICTURE OF A FIRE BURNING DURING THE LA RIOTS



# KOREANS IN AMERICA

Koreans began flocking to America in the 1970s.

They were unaware of the history of the cities they were moving into.

They didn't know about the 1965 Watts Riots. Koreans were discriminated against like all the other minorities and could not find jobs in the corporate market.

At the time, many small business owners in LA and other inner cities, were beginning to leave, including the Jewish American population and were selling their shops.

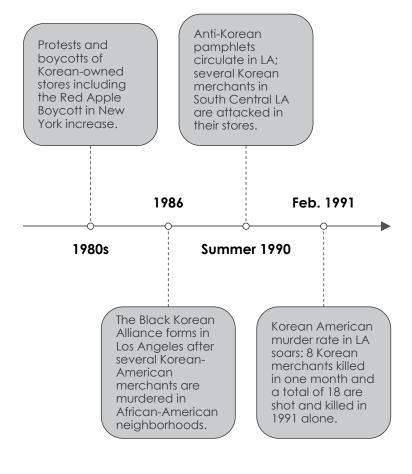
## KOREANS IN AMERICA CONTINUED

Korean Americans saw an opportunity to purchase cheap businesses they could afford in inner city communities like Compton, Watts, and Flushing, NY, and other inner cities.

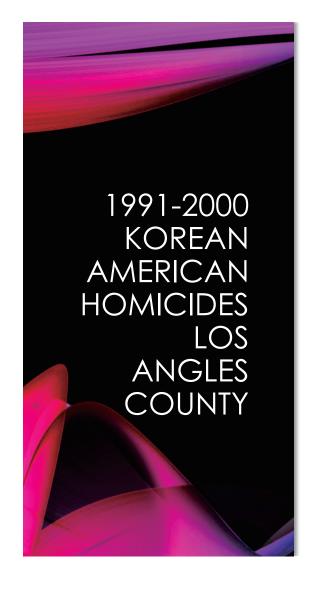
For 20 years, Korean Americans worked in these neighborhoods, isolated in their communities.

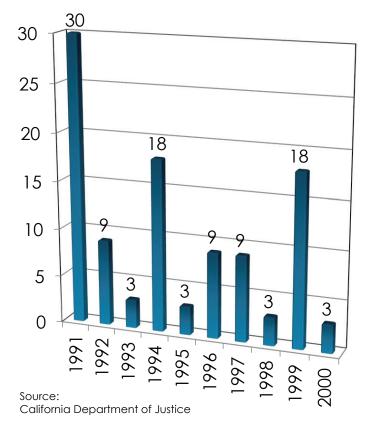
Cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication between Korean Americans and African Americans escalated over the years.

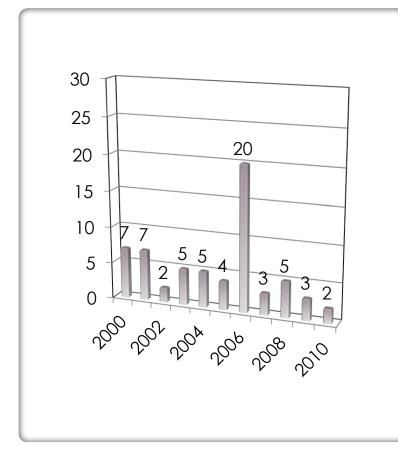
By the 1980s, the racial tension was like a stick of dynamite waiting to be lit.



# RACIAL TENSION







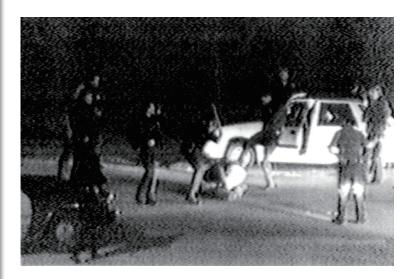
KOREAN AMERICAN HOMICIDES 2000-2010 LOS ANGELES COUNTY



## EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE LA RIOTS



Rodney King is pulled over & beaten by LAPD. Caught on tape, the incident is played by media repeatedly. The African American community is angered.	Soon Ja Du shoots and kills Latasha Harlins on March 16, 1991 in Los Angeles. The tape of the shooting is played by media, further exacerbati ng tensions.	Two Korean employees in LA are shot and killed while working at a liquor store.	A Korean- Black Truce is mediated by Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley; it doesn't help.	Rapper Ice Cube releases solo album featuring a song called "Black Korea." The lyrics express hostility toward Korean Americans
Mar. 3, 1991	Mar. 16, 1991	May 1991	1991	Oct. 1991



A photo of the Rodney King beating night of March 3, 1991. The incident was caught on tape by a local resident.

The African American community was outraged and demanded justice.

#### RODNEY KING BEATING MARCH 3, 1991

# EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE RIOTS CONTINUED

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The trial for the officers in the King beating is moved to Simi Valley, a predomin antly white neighborh ood.	Du is found guilty of murder; sentenced to 5 years probation, 400 hours community service, & a \$500 fine; African American community outraged.	The African American community waits for justice in the King beating case. The trial is set for April 1992.	The four officers involved in the King beating are found NOT GUILTY. The riots erupt at 3:15 PM in LA.	After six days of violence, the National Guard helps bring peace and the riots are officially over.
Nov. 1991	Jan. 1992	April 1992	April 29, 1992	May 4, 1992

## OTHER REASONS FOR THE RIOTS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Poor education, no investment in inner city schools.

The economy had just tanked with the 1987 stock market crash and the resulting recession lasted for well into 1992. •This meant there were fewer jobs, less money to go around, and government budget cuts to programs that were desperately needed. Police brutality was severe in South Central Los Angeles.

Crack hit the streets and gangs such as the Bloods and the Crips began dealing the drug; crime and violence escalated.



FLOWERS OR ROSES: AKA CRACK PIPES WERE AND ARE COMMON DRUG PARAPHERNAL IN INNER CITIES.

## KOREAN AMERICANS DURING THE RIOTS: TARGETED

During the 1992 LA Riots Korean Americans were targeted. KAs also had no political voice.

Of the \$1 Billion in damages suffered, Korean Americans suffered 40% of the losses.

Koreatown was abandoned by law enforcement and Koreans were left to defend themselves. Media unfairly portrayed Koreans as gun toting vigilantes.

One Korean American was killed.

## KOREAN AMERICANS TARGETED CONTINUED

Shop owners placed signs in their windows saying "Not Korean," "Black Owned," and "Latino Owned," so their businesses wouldn't be looted or destroyed.

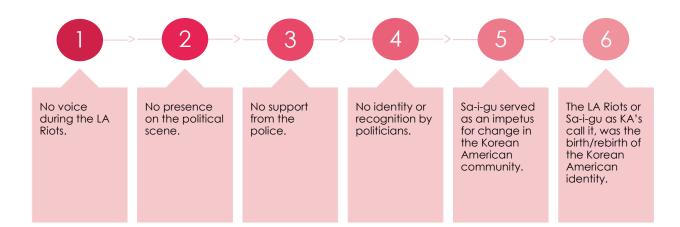
Koreans realized they had to raise their voices and organized the largest gathering of Asian Americans in history for a Peace March during the riots.



MAY 2, 1992 KOREAN AMERICANS MARCH FOR PEACE



### THE ABSENCE OF KOREAN AMERICAN VOICE & IDENTITY DURING THE RIOTS



## KOREAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AFTER THE LA RIOTS

Communicated with the community and formed organizations to bridge cultural gaps.

 Korean American Resource Council in Chicago.
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium.

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Sa-i-Gu was a watershed moment for Korean Americans whose identity was born on April 29, 1992.

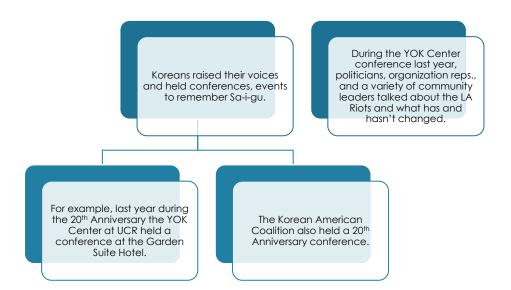
• After the riots, Koreans no longer saw themselves as Korean nationals living in a foreign country, but as Korean Americans.



Participated in politics.

•For example, Korean Americans united to protest the redistricting of Koreatown last year; this would have been unheard of in 1992.

#### KOREAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AFTER THE LA RIOTS CONTINUED



## KOREANS AFTER THE LA RIOTS CONTINUED

Korean Americans began communicating with their communities. English speaking 2<sup>nd</sup> generation KAS helped in the process, making KAs less isolated.

Koreans are more visible and are now part of mainstream American culture; ex. Gangnam Style/Hallyu Wave. Koreans have a made a positive presence in politics and in their communities. Ex. David Ryu is now first Korean American to serve on the LA City Council.

# SO WHY DOES THIS ALL MATTER TODAY?

#### Racial tension is still an issue

For example the District of Columbia Council Member Marion Barry made racist remarks, "We've got to do something about these Asians coming in, opening up businesses, those dirty shops. They ought to go, I'll just say that right now, you know."



The Riots shaped the Korean American identity, now we must endeavor to raise our voices and become more visible.

# WHY DOES IT MATTER? CONTINUED

The demographic shift in Los Angeles has created a new breeding ground for cultural misunderstandings.

LA is now dominated by the Hispanic and Latin American community. Korean Americans and African Americans have begun to leave South Central LA.

Businesses are being bought by Southeast Asians and Arab Americans creating another environment for racial tension as they coexist with the Hispanic community.

Basically, the structural conditions that ignited the LA Riots still exist today.

# CAN ANOTHER RIOT HAPPEN AGAIN?

#### Absolutely.

According to UC Riverside Professor of Ethnic Studies and LA Riots expert Edward T. Chang: "Twenty years later, LA is still divided along racial and ethnic lines and struggling. We have not made any substantial changes and improvements with the structural conditions that caused the LA Riots of 1992. Although we are far more accepting of differences and tolerant toward others, it seems that we have a long way to go to improve race relations. We do just enough to get along."



#### 01

Build coalitions and work with each other to understand our different cultures.

#### 02

Develop strong leadership to help our communities and raise our voices in the community, in politics, and through nonprofits.

#### 03

Educate ourselves and future generations.



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Carol K. Park YOK Center UC Riverside January 2018